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ABSTRACT

Designed to help today's educators apply to current problems the wisdom gained from more than five decades of experience with the core concept, this pamphlet sets forth basic underlying philosophy and useful guidelines to develop or refine core programs at any level of schooling. The introduction establishes the philosophical framework within which the position statement was developed. The rationale for core curriculum is then set forth as ten "Assumptions and Beliefs on which Core is Based." Each of these is elaborated, with specific implications for both the core program and core teacher. This is followed by "Suggestion Implementation Procedures" for developing a new core program or improving an existing one. Appendix A consists of a Self-Evaluation Guide for Core Teachers based on the rationale and implications, and enables educators to determine the extent to which their beliefs and practices conform to the core rationale. Appendix B lists services provided by the National Association for Core Curriculum, Inc. (TRS)

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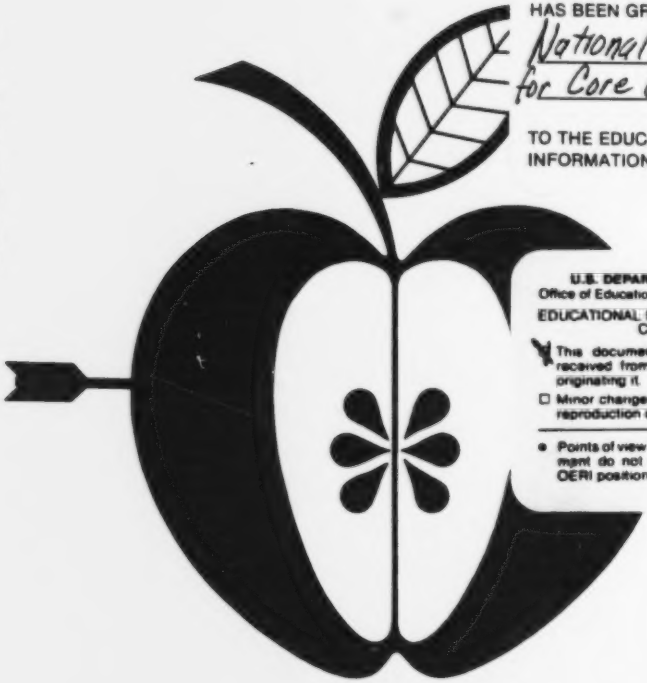

CORE TODAY!

RATIONALE and IMPLICATIONS

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Third Edition
National Association for Core Curriculum, Inc.

CORE TODAY!

RATIONALE AND IMPLICATIONS

Third Edition

National Association for Core Curriculum, Inc.

Kent, Ohio 44242

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PREFACE

This publication sets forth the basic philosophy that underlies interdisciplinary, problem-focused, student-centered, and guidance-oriented programs known by such names as core, common learnings, block-time, or humanities. First published in 1973, it continues to provide useful guidelines for educators seeking to develop or to refine core programs at any level—elementary, middle school, high school, or college.

"Humanizing the schools," "personalizing instruction," "individualizing," and "teaching thinking skills" are perennial concerns in education. Each reflects an approach to education that has been prominent in the core curriculum movement since its beginning in the 1930's. This position paper is designed to help today's educators apply to current problems the wisdom gained from more than five decades of experience with the core concept.

The "Introduction" establishes the philosophical framework within which the position statement was developed. The rationale for core curriculum is then set forth as ten "Assumptions and Beliefs on which Core is Based." Each of these is elaborated, with specific implications for both the core program and for the core teacher. This is followed by "Suggested Implementation Procedures" for developing a new core program or for improving a core program already in existence.

Appendix A consists of *a Self-Evaluation Guide for Core Teachers* based on the rationale and implications. This self-rating scale may be used by educators to determine the extent to which their beliefs and practices conform to the core rationale. Appendix B lists services provided by the National Association for Core Curriculum, Inc.

The National Association for Core Curriculum was established in 1953 and incorporated in 1964. In 1971, Maurice Erly, who was then Core Supervisor in Prince George's County, Maryland, and President of NACC, challenged the Association to provide more assistance to educators seeking to develop core programs or to apply core ideas more effectively in the schools. An informal meeting of interested members was held at the NACC annual convention in Lexington, Kentucky, on October 21, 1971, at which time the following needs were identified:

1. A statement of goals and objectives of core and its underlying assumptions and beliefs.
2. A self-evaluation instrument for use by core teachers.
3. A self-evaluation instrument for use by administrators and supervisors to aid in facilitating core development.
4. An evaluation instrument for visiting teams to use in evaluating a school's core program.
5. Descriptions of methods for implementing and achieving core objectives.

The group formed itself into a task force, and each person agreed to organize a small subgroup to work on one or more of these needs. The subgroup formed in Kansas consisted of the following people: Jan Mauck, Seaman Unified District; Sandee Crowther, Lawrence; Sharon King, Shawnee Mission; and Karl Edwards, University of Kansas. The group met several times during the 1971-72 school term and in June 1972. Its preliminary statement was modified by the Task

Force meeting in Eugene, Oregon, on October 11, 1972, then submitted to the members present at the Eugene Convention for additional suggestions. The statement was further revised at the Task Force meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on March 19 and 20, 1973, and edited by Maurice Erly and Gordon Vars. Final revisions and acceptance were accomplished at the 21st Annual Core Conference, held in Prince George's County, Maryland, October 15-20, 1973.

The second edition was based on suggestions made in October 1979 by Craig Larson, Arlene Weise, and Rita Wylie, all of the Parkway School District, Chesterfield, Missouri. Their recommendations were reviewed during the fall of 1979 by a committee of the NACC Board of Directors consisting of: William C. McCormack, Roseland, New Jersey; Morrel J. Clute, Oxford, Michigan; and Doris Nesbit, Miami, Florida. Final editing was by Gordon Vars and Craig Larson.

At the 1984 conference, a committee consisting of Ruthi Rapp, Peggy Sorenson, Gary Weedman, Bill McCormack, and Doris Nesbit reorganized the content, preparing the document for another printing. Final editing was by Gordon Vars and Alice McVetty Vars.

The association wishes to thank the many members who have contributed to the preparation of this document. Readers are invited to communicate their reactions and suggestions to the NACC headquarters.

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INTRODUCTION

Because it is such a complex concept, the core curriculum has been in the past, and probably will continue to be in the future, defined in many ways. Too many definitions to date have been centered around time blocks, personnel arrangements, physical facilities, and combinations of traditional subject field content. Far more important is the emphasis on meeting the needs of students, as manifested in the rapidly changing society of the time in which we live. The statements which follow represent an attempt to eliminate the shortcomings of earlier definitions and statements.

It is the contention of the committee that:

A. Core philosophy can be implemented and core goals achieved under a wide variety of time, space, and personnel arrangements.

B. Adherence to the concepts expressed in the statements which follow is more important than whether the program employs modular scheduling, team teaching, and open space rooms, rather than fixed time blocks, individual teachers, and single rooms.

C. Experimentation with various arrangements of time, space, and personnel should be encouraged, as well as their evaluation in terms of their effectiveness in achieving core objectives.

D. The core concept implies that the total curriculum is organized in four interrelated subdivisions:

1. The core program, a major part of general education, is devoted to the study of problems and the development of competencies commonly needed by all students.

2. Other required subjects which are designed to meet common needs that are not provided for through the core program.

3. Elective subjects or mini-courses which provide for individual exploration and the cultivation of specialized interests to a greater depth than either the core program or the other required subjects.

4. The student activity program.

ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS ON WHICH CORE IS BASED

I. Interests, concerns, and needs expressed by students provide a valid basis for curriculum content and are central to the learning process.

II. Learning involves changes in behavior which are brought about through experience.

III. A democratic society values the worth and dignity of the individual.

IV. A democratic society requires citizens who are skilled in the decision-making process.

V. Appropriate emphasis must be given to the various aspects of learning, including: clarification of values, development of learning skills, mastering important concepts, and acquiring needed information.

VI. Learning experiences are enhanced when the learner is encouraged and helped to draw upon all appropriate sources of information.

VII. The extent and nature of classroom activity should determine the allocation of time.

VIII. The teacher's primary roles should be those of an advisor, a facilitator, a friend, and a fellow learner.

IX. Teaching and many aspects of guidance are complementary functions of the teacher.

X. To bring about continuous improvement in learning, all concerned parties should be involved in evaluation.

RATIONALE AND IMPLICATIONS

I. Interests, concerns, and needs expressed by students provide a valid basis for curriculum content and are central to the learning process.

THEREFORE . . .

Core makes extensive use of problems of personal and social concern or topics of current interest which have been identified by students, rather than content pre-determined by teachers.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. Opportunities for students to express ideas and concerns.
   2. Opportunities for students to select, or share in selecting, some of the problems and topics to be studied individually or in groups.
   3. For several topics or sub-topics to be studied at the same time by different small groups or individuals within a class.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Encourages students to express their ideas and concerns about problems and topics they want to study through the use of such techniques as: surveys, discussions, small group consensus sessions, etc.
   2. Helps students to develop criteria for selecting topics for study and to apply the criteria during the selection process.
   3. Organizes the class so that individuals and small groups may be working on different topics at the same time.
   4. Relates the near at hand and easy to understand—local issues, school problems, student council, class problems and incidents—to issues of broader concern.
   5. Keeps continuous records of observations of students, which serve as leads to interests, concerns, and needs.

II. Learning involves changes in behavior which are brought about through experience.

THEREFORE . . .

A. Core draws on many disciplines and a wide range of informational sources, materials, and activities relevant to the vital problems and topics of personal and social concern.

B. Core provides experiences in sharing information, respecting the rights and contributions of others, and taking responsibility.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. A wide range of materials, events, and people as resources for learning.
   2. A setting in which students and teachers have easy access to varied materials.

3. Policies which facilitate varied activities within the building with a minimum of restrictions on student mobility.
4. Time and transportation for student and teacher use of community resources.
5. Support for the organization and functioning of individuals or small groups working on different topics at the same time, with emphasis on continuous improvement of group process.

B. The core teacher:
1. Encourages and instructs students in the use of varied media and materials from many disciplines that bear on a problem or topic.
2. Develops a reservoir of cataloged resources within the building and encourages responsible student mobility in making use of these resources; and develops a similar reservoir of community resources and participates with and assists students in using them.
3. Makes use of experiences that students have during non-school hours.
4. Frequently organizes the class into small groups and helps students develop concern for the continuous improvement of group processes.

III. A democratic society values the worth and dignity of the individual.

THEREFORE . . .

A. Core seeks the optimum development of each individual and his or her special aptitudes.

B. Core requires that the teacher treat each student with humaneness and respect. In turn, students become aware of their own humanity and of their relationships and responsibilities to other human beings.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
1. Opportunity for self-expression, participation in significant decision-making, and individualized learning.
2. Emphasis on success and achievement rather than on grades and failure.
3. Opportunities for students to learn to accept and work harmoniously with people who differ in many respects (race, ability, age, ethnic group, socio-economic status, sex, religion, etc.).

B. The core teacher:
1. Tries to discover each student's individual needs and interests and to develop with each an individualized program of skill improvement and content exploration.
2. Plans class procedures so that students share in decision-making on matters that they perceive as important.
3. Provides meaningful and important tasks for each student.
4. Provides for frequent conferences with individual students.
5. Accepts all students fully as worthwhile persons.
6. Helps students learn to judge themselves realistically through a variety of methods.

7. Provides opportunities for every student to experience success, and gives praise and recognition for success rather than ridicule or criticism for failure.
8. Respects the ideas of the students as meaningful contributions to the learning process.

IV. A democratic society requires citizens who are skilled in the decision-making process.

THEREFORE . . .

A. Core emphasizes the development of problem-solving techniques and procedures.
B. Core requires that students become actively involved in all class activities.

IMPLICATION:

A. The core program provides:
   1. Opportunities for students to be involved in setting goals and objectives, planning areas of study, deciding on methods of study, pursuing the study and evaluating the results, and accepting the consequences.
   2. Opportunities for solving problems by using the skills and processes of critical thinking.
B. The core teacher:
   1. Utilizes class meetings, discussion, and teacher-student planning to help formulate and guide the learning experiences of the class.
   2. Encourages each person to contribute ideas and materials.
   3. Provides extensive opportunities for student leadership.
   4. Assists students in understanding how to use discussion to clarify and improve thinking.
   5. Provides for elections, and helps students examine issues and candidates.
   6. Helps students to develop an appreciation for one another and for the problem-solving process.
   7. Helps the students feel that it is their class—what they do affects class decisions.
   8. Helps students develop the skills of problem solving and critical thinking.
   9. Helps students clarify their values as vital elements in decision-making.
   10. Serves as a facilitator rather than an authority figure in the decision-making process.

V. Appropriate emphasis must be given to the various aspects of learning, including: clarification of values, development of learning skills, mastering important concepts, and acquiring needed information.

THEREFORE . . .

A. Core includes as its main goals those qualities, competencies, and characteristics needed to become effective and responsible citizens.

B. Core seeks to develop the self-directed learner who will think of education as a continuous life-long process.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. For the utilization of the inductive approach to teaching, in which the learner becomes an active participant in the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, and examination of values and beliefs.
   2. For evaluation of students on more than the mere acquisition of information.
   3. Opportunities for students to learn to communicate effectively, to do research, to carry out a task, to listen, to use parliamentary skills, and to solve problems.
   4. Extensive oportunites for students to examine and clarify their values.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Examines individual and group needs when determining which learning skills are to be developed.
   2. Uses a variety of evaluation techniques to determine student progress.
   3. Provides students with many avenues for success and recognition, with more emphasis on such things as leadership, social skills, and artistic abilities, than on fact acquisition.
   4. Encourages students to set personal goals which they periodically review and revise.
   5. Takes time with the class to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning skills, processes, and experience.
   6. De-emphasizes the use of tests that require only the acquisition of facts.

VI. Learning experiences are enhanced when the learner is encouraged and helped to draw upon all appropriate sources of information.

THEREFORE . . .

Core helps the student to correlate and integrate his learning.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. Cataloged sources of information both in and outside the school, including people, events, places, and materials.
   2. A multi-text and multi-resource approach based on various reading levels and topics.
   3. Easy access by teachers and students to varied materials from many parts of the school.
   4. Opportunity, including regularly scheduled time, for core teachers to meet as a group to share information about learning resources.
   5. Regular and systematic communication between core teachers and other teachers in the school so that optimum use may be made of all teachers' expertise in implementing the goals of the core program.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Organizes the learning environment so that emphasis on separate and distinct subjects will be minimized, and major emphasis will be placed on studying problems and topics of interest to students, improving learning and communication skills, and drawing from any applicable discipline.
   2. Encourages students to use a wide variety of printed, visual, sound, and human resources which are appropriate to each individual's needs, abilities, and interests, and which contribute to the study of a problem or topic.
   3. Shares with other core teachers information about learning resources.
   4. Establishes communication with teachers in other fields and makes use of their expertise in core classes.
   5. Actively brings outside resources into the classroom.

VII. The extent and nature of classroom activity should determine the allocation time.

THEREFORE . . .

Core is scheduled in extended blocks of time.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. Two to three hours of uninterrupted class time.
   2. Complete flexibility within the time block so that teachers and students may plan for optimum use of the time.
   3. Occasional planned use of time beyond the core time block for field trips or other extended activities.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Plans with the students for the division of the time block to provide for the varied activities of the class, without allocating any specific number of minutes to any "subject."
   2. Recognizes the need for frequent change in the nature of the activity, and changes when the need is evident, rather than when a predetermined amount of time has been spent on an activity.
   3. Plans well in advance for any activity that requires time beyond the core time block and communicates this plan to appropriate administrative personnel and teachers who would be affected.

VIII. The teacher's primary roles should be those of an advisor, a facilitator, a friend, and a fellow learner.

THEREFORE . . .

The core teacher functions as an advisor, friend, facilitator, organizer, co-planner and fellow learner who assists youth in discovering and clarifying what is important for them to learn.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. For extensive teacher-student planning.
   2. Opportunities for students, teachers, and parents to confer regularly regarding the student's growth, and to determine the needed direction for future learning activities.
   3. Opportunities to study areas not necessarily limited to the teacher's background and knowledge.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Learns with students as they explore topics or areas which are unfamiliar to the teacher.
   2. Joins with students in the planning process, research, presentation and evaluation of learnings.
   3. Confers frequently with students to determine strengths and weaknesses and to plan jointly strategies for improvement.
   4. Seeks to develop warm and friendly relations with all students.

IX. Teaching and many aspects of guidance are complementary functions of the teacher.

THEREFORE . . .

Individual and group guidance are integral elements of core teaching.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. Evaluation procedures that report more than subject-matter achievement.
   2. A flexible curriculum and an extended time block which allow for guidance activities.
   3. Guidance materials appropriate to the classroom.
   4. Opportunities for students to examine their problems, values, and concerns.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Regards each student as a unique individual.
   2. Makes an effort to become acquainted with the student's experiences, both inside and outside the classroom.
   3. Is constantly attentive to the positive development of the student's self-concept.
   4. Provides opportunities for discussions involving value clarification and personal problem solving.
   5. Utilizes current literature and techniques concerning guidance.
   6. Realizes that student progress should not be evaluated on the basis of academic achievement alone, but also on his ability to accept himself and deal with his surroundings.
   7. Recognizes that everything he does has guidance implications.

X. To bring about continuous improvement in learning, all concerned parties should be involved in evaluation.

THEREFORE . . .

Core benefits from continuous evaluation by teacher, students, administrators, parents, and visiting teams.

IMPLICATIONS:

A. The core program provides:
   1. For the involvement of parents and students in evaluating the program.
   2. Appropriate evaluative instruments.
   3. Time for teachers to confer with appropriate personnel on the subject of evaluation.
   4. Opportunities for community members and visiting teams to evaluate the core program.

B. The core teacher:
   1. Provides opportunity for students to develop evaluation instruments to judge their own progress.
   2. Provides opportunity for students to develop standards for classroom projects.
   3. Encourages students to evaluate at frequent intervals the success of class work.
   4. Confers frequently with staff members on the effectiveness of all aspects of the curriculum.
   5. Utilizes two-way communication with parents.
   6. Participates actively in the continuing evaluation of the core program through conferences with administrators, with other core teachers, and with visiting teams.
   7. Makes use of standardized tests, when appropriate, to evaluate aspects of the core program.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

The following procedures are suggested as guidelines which a school might use in attempting to move from a traditional to a core program or to implement more fully the objectives of a core program already in existence.

1. Involve the entire staff—administrators, supervisors, counselors, librarians and all teachers—in a comprehensive study of this bulletin. During this study, attention should be given to such questions as:
   a. Do we accept this assumption or belief? If so, what does it mean to us in this school in terms of our relation to and interactions with our students? If not, what statement would we substitute for it and how would it affect our educational program?
   b. Exactly what does this objective or goal mean to us in terms of the day-to-day interrelationships of staff and students? Can we take this goal or objective, stated somewhat generally as it is, and translate it into more behaviorally stated terms that we can see and measure in the classroom? For example, consider this statement: "Core makes extensive use of problems of personal and social concern...." This might be stated behaviorally as: "Given the task of identifying common problems of personal or social concern, the class will, in a reasonable length of time and with minimum participation by the teacher, develop statements of such problems." Coming to grips with these kinds of tasks is a step in the direction of implementation. Development of statements similar to this for each of the goals and objectives must follow. It will not be a quickly completed task.
2. Bring students, parents, and other community representatives into the planning at an early stage, and keep communication lines open among all groups at all times.
3. Secure commitment to these assumptions and beliefs, implications, and goals and objectives by most of the staff before dealing with matters of time, space, staffing patterns, and curriculum materials.
4. Then develop and agree on the general curriculum design—the degree of structure, if any, for content—the skill areas to be stressed, the time schedule, the space arrangement, the staffing pattern, the essential materials, etc., that the staff feels will best fulfill the goals and objectives in this school and community setting.
5. As the program becomes operational, encourage the staff to use self-evaluation instruments and, as the time becomes appropriate, invite an evaluation team to apply a program evaluation instrument.
6. Hold frequent "brain-storming" sessions involving staff, students, parents, and community representatives, and devote constant attention to ways to improve procedures for meeting the goals and objectives.

APPENDIX A. Self Evaluation Guide for Core Teachers

Introduction

The major purpose of this self-evaluation is to provide teachers an opportunity to examine basic philosophical and implementing ideas for the core curriculum. Such a process is self-directed. It is intended to assist you to see yourself as you teach in a core program. If it is mutually acceptable, such a guide might be used as a basis for discussion with one's fellow core teachers, principal, or instructional supervisor.

This self-evaluation guide is based on the National Association for Core Curriculum's publication, "Core Today: Rationale and Implications." Each of the below-listed response items parallels the publication's assumptions and beliefs, their implications for the Core Program (A), and for the core teacher (B).

Instructions

Each respondent should begin on page 3 of "Core Today; Rationale and Implications." Responses pertaining to the core program (A items) should be based on the teacher's understanding of the program as it currently exists in his school. Responses pertaining to the core teacher (B items) should reflect the respondent's current self-perception.

For each implication statement, circle the appropriate number, interpreted as follows:

The core teacher feels that this characteristic, attitude, or practice is:

3-an area of strength
2-present but not always visible
1-not currently present but is a goal toward which I would like to work
0-not a necessary attribute

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VII.

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VIII.

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IX.

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X.

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B.
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APPENDIX B. Services of the National Association for Core Curriculum, Inc.

The National Association for Core Curriculum is a membership corporation, registered in the State of New York, designed to promote the development of general education programs variously known as core, common learnings, unified studies, block-time, etc. It continues the historic movement for integrated, student-centered education in the tradition of John Dewey, Hollis Caswell, Nelson Bossing, Harold Alberty, Roland Faunce, and many others. Its services include:

- The annual N.A.C.C. conference
  Inspiring speakers, how-to-do-it sessions, fellowship with others from across the nation, opportunities to present your expertise and to participate in decision-making.
- *The Core Teacher*
  Quarterly newsletter of N.A.C.C. activities; description of inter-disciplinary programs at elementary, middle, high school, and college levels; research; book reviews.
- Publications
  Bibliographies; curriculum guides; unit plans; position booklet, "Core Today"; brochure, "Core, as in Apple"; etc.
- Books
  Discounts on books dealing with core and other interdisciplinary programs.
- Audiotapes
  Addresses at N.A.C.C. conferences; talks by noted educators such as Combs, Van Til, Frymier, Clute, Lounsbury, Vars, Nichols, Simon.
- Films
  On block-of-time teaching. Dr. Rosalind Zapf Pickard demonstrates core methods with Detroit junior high students.
- Filmstrips
  Teaching democratic processes; how to muster personal and material resources for interdisciplinary teaching.
- Ideas
  Activities and techniques found effective in block-time, core, humanities, and other interdisciplinary programs. Student worksheets, "gimmicks," lesson plans, swap sheets, teacher-developed creative ideas, etc.
- Resource persons
  Names of board members, core teachers, or knowledgeable and experienced persons in your area who could speak, lead workshops, or evaluate, upon invitation, matched to your needs.
- Research
  Periodic reviews and a comprehensive bibliography of research on the effectiveness of block time, core, humanities, and other interdisciplinary programs.
- Scholarship funds
  Financial aid for doing graduate level research or developmental projects pertinent to core curriculum.

For further information, write NACC, 404 White Hall, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242. Telephone (216) 672-2792.